

First Evangelical Lutheran Church
(Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church)
Two blocks east of County Road R-38
and one block north of NW 166
Avenue
Sheldahl
Story County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-62

HABS
IOWA,
85-SHEL,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
(SHELDAHL NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH)

HABS No. IA-62

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IOWA,
85-SHEL,
1-

Location: Two blocks east of County Road R-38 and one block north of NW 166 Avenue in the town of Sheldahl. Sheldahl lies in three counties: Story, Polk, and Boone. The church is in the town's northeast portion, which lies in Story County.

Present owner: Anna Sheldahl

Present use: The building remains a church, but is used very seldom.

Significance: The building is an excellent example of a frugal and simple church built by an immigrant Norwegian pastor, Osmund Sheldahl, for his flock. It survives virtually in its original condition.

PART 1.

HISTORY

Date of construction:

The carved sign now over the door of the church states that the date of construction was 1883, and available sources agree on this date (3; 5).

Chronology:

1883 Construction of the church (3).

1883-1936 Regular use of the church for services (4).

1896 Osmund Sheldahl ceased preaching at the church (3).
Recent years The walls were covered with plasterboard, which was
subsequently removed. Electricity was also installed (5).
1968 The church was cleaned (4).
1973 The exterior was painted (4).
1974 June 30 The church was used for a memorial service in honor of
Osmund Sheldahl (4).

Architect or designer:

Unknown, but probably Osmund Sheldahl.

Original and subsequent owners:

Since the death of the original owner, Osmund Sheldahl, the church
has always been owned by his heirs and presently by Anna Sheldahl (4).

Original and subsequent names:

Originally, the congregation and church were called the First
Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Sheldahl. In popular usage, however,
the church became known as the Old Sheldahl Church or the Sheldahl
Lutheran Church. Today it is officially called the Sheldahl Norwegian
Lutheran Church (2).

Contractors and supplies:

The church was built by Osmund Sheldahl with the help of his sons,
Oliver and Henry, and some friends in the community (3).

They also built the pulpit, altar, altar rail and pews.

The lumber used was all locally grown and cut and was furnished
by Sheldahl (3,5).

Historial events and persons associated with the building:

The most significant figure associated with the church history is

that of Osmund Sheldahl (originally spelled "Schiedal"). The last of nine children, he was born at Etne, Sønnhordland, Norway, on February 4, 1824. He was baptised on February 5, 1824 and was confirmed in the Støble Church in Etne, Norway. Though he had little formal schooling, he served as a visitant teacher in the years before he left Norway for America.

Before leaving Norway in 1845, he married Anna Tesdal, who subsequently bore him nine children. After her death in 1881, he married again in 1882 to Anna Tweedt, who bore him four children, and died in 1936 (3;8).

Osmund Sheldahl came from Norway to the Fox River settlement (near Lisbon) in Kendall County, Illinois. This area had been settled by many other Norwegians and he spent his first ten years in America here as a farmer, parochial school teacher, and lay preacher (3). However, there was no more government land available for \$1.25 an acre in this area, so Sheldahl and three other Norwegians came westward in 1854 in search of land. They decided to settle in the vicinity of the present Palestine Lutheran Church, between the present towns of Huxley and Sheldahl (3). On May 17, 1855, twenty-one families left Lisbon, Illinois, in covered wagons, and on June 7 they arrived at their destination in Iowa (5).

In 1860 Osmund Sheldahl was ordained by Pastor Hasselquist of the Palestine Lutheran Church (3).

In 1874, Sheldahl and J. S. Polk subdivided their adjoining lands in Story, platting the town of Sheldahl. Polk's land was about twice the area of Sheldahl's (4.1, p. 389).

In 1877 Sheldahl built his house and moved to the new town bearing his name. At this time religious services were held in people's homes.

In 1883, Pastor Sheldahl, with help from his sons Oliver and Henry and some friends in the community, built the church, including the pulpit-altar, altar rail, and pews. Upon completion he "invited one and all, who wanted Bible preaching, to come to the services, because he would preach the Bible and nothing but the Bible," he said (3). He preached there until 1896, without pay (5).

Osmund Sheldahl died on May 29, 1900. Funeral services were held for him in both Slater and Sheldahl, and he was buried at the Sheldahl Lutheran Cemetery (8). Services continued to be held at the church. Sheldahl's will, drawn up in 1898, specifically stated that the church should be left as it was, not destroyed, for the use of anyone, no matter what denomination, so long as the Bible was preached. Upkeep of the building was left in the hands of his heirs (5)¹.

After Sheldahl's death the church continued to be used regularly until the death of his second wife in 1936. Since then the church has been used infrequently, only for special occasions. On March 7, 1942, Marion Sheldahl, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Martin Sheldahl and granddaughter of Osmund Sheldahl, was married in the church to Richard Curphey, and on June 30, 1974 a memorial service honoring its founder was held in the church (3).

The church has been resingled and painted. The interior walls at one time had been whitewashed, but later were covered with plasterboard. The plasterboard has been removed and the walls have been restored to their original condition (3). The original brass brackets for kerosene lanterns are still in the building, although electric

¹There is no record of the will having been recorded in either Polk or Story Counties from 1900 to 1933.

lights have been installed (3).

PART 2. DESCRIPTION

Condition of the fabric:

Fair, both interior and exterior.

Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 28 feet 5 inches wide and 30 feet 7 5/8 inches long and 35 feet 1 inch high (1).
2. Number of bays: Not applicable.
3. Number of stories: One story with an attic.
4. Layout shape: Rectangular.
5. Foundation: Rubble and fieldstone laid on the ground with timber beams resting directly on the stones and serving as supports for the flooring.
6. Wall construction: Wood balloon frame construction (1). Exterior clapboard with 4 to 4 1/2 inches of each piece exposed. The siding is painted white and is nailed 2 feet on center with both round head and square head nails.
7. Structural system: Floor beams are native white pine rough timber.
8. Porches: There is a stoop in front of the entry doors consisting of eight concrete blocks, each 34 by 29 inches with a rectangle 18 1/2 by 14 inches scored in the surface. The stoop has no roof or shelter.

9. Chimneys: There is a red brick chimney which rests on a bracket fastened to the timber framing of the north wall. It flares out from the north wall on the interior of the church, approximately thirteen feet above the floor, and is continuous up through the ceiling and roof.
10. Doorways and doors: A pair of wood doors, painted white on the outside and each with two panels are at the entrance. Each door is approximately 2 feet by 7 feet and is held open or closed with metal locks. There is a knob on the left door as one faces the building but no knob on the right door. The entrance has a wood and iron threshold.
11. Windows: The windows are all double hung, each sash with four panes of glass. The center vertical mullion of each sash is thicker than the horizontal mullion.
12. Roof shape and covering: The roof is a gable type with the ridge line running parallel with the long dimension of the plan. There is a small roof supported on four white painted posts forming a belfry at the center of the roof front.

Roofs are covered with wood shingles.
13. Cornice, eaves: The underside of the roof overhang is enclosed with wood. There are no gutters or downspouts.
14. Carved wooden sign above entrance door: "Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church founded in 1883 by Pastor Osmund Sheldahl." The lettering is Old English and is very well executed. The sign appears to be new.

Description of interior:

1. Floor plans: The church is rectangular with a central aisle from the entrance doors to the pulpit and altar rail. There are eight pews facing the pulpit on the left side of the aisle and seven pews facing the pulpit on the right side of the aisle (left and right are taken as one enters the church). In addition, to the right of the pulpit there are three pews running parallel to the aisle. To the left of the pulpit is a raised platform used as the organ platform. The pulpit is centered in the chancel and has steps leading up to it on both sides. In front of the pulpit is a raised semicircular kneeling rail. Beside the fourth and fifth pews immediately off the left of the central aisle is an iron pot-bellied stove.
2. Stairways: None.
3. Flooring: The floor is made of unfinished planks about five inches wide running across the church. The raised organ platform (which has two old organs on it) is covered with brown and beige carpet and the kneeling pad and chancel floor in front of the pulpit is covered with red and black carpet. There are striped runner carpets in the aisle and to the right of the kneeling rail.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are covered with 1 inch thick horizontal whitewashed boards ranging in width from about 6 to 18 inches. There is a vertical-grooved, 38-inch-high wainscot painted a yellow-brown at all walls. The ceiling is of wood planks about 5 inches wide running the length of the plan and

is painted a strong blue.

5. Doorways and doors: The door frame and doors are painted yellow-brown on the inside. There is also a blue painted trap door over the pulpit which leads to the attic.
6. Windows: The window frames are painted yellow-brown on the inside.
7. Special decorative features, trim, and cabinet work: There is a simple scrollwork design on the brackets which support the bible stand at the front of the pulpit. There are scrolled brass brackets for oil lamps installed on the walls but the lamps and extension brackets are kept by Mrs. Anna Sheldahl in her home. The pulpit has panels similar to those on the entrance doors.
8. Mechanical equipment: The pot-belly stove centrally located in the church is labeled "Old Hyprion" No. 5 by Solar Stove Works. Harris and Zoiner. Patent date 1868 (1). There is a circular metal pipe leading from the stove overhead to the chimney. The pipe is supported at 5 places by double wires. Electrical service, when needed, is provided by connecting the recently installed church electrical system to the Sheldahl home service lines (4).

Site and surroundings:

The church is on private land owned by Anna Sheldahl, who lives immediately adjacent to the church on the left. In front of the church on the immediately adjacent lot is Osmund Sheldahl's house.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PART 3.

Primary or unpublished sources

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2. Anderson, William L. "Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church." Historic American Buildings Survey, Inventory Form, 17 April 1971.
3. Holen, Olaf. "Brief Sketch of Pastor Osmund Sheldahl's Life." Church Bulletin for the Memorial Service held 30 June 1974.
4. Sheldahl, Anna. Sheldahl, Iowa. Interview, 5 July 1974.
- 4.1 Story County, Iowa. Deed Record Town Lots G.

Secondary or published sources

5. "Church Built in 1883 Still Stands--Centers Historical Records of Osmund Sheldahl." Undated newspaper article framed and hung in the Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church.
6. "More on the Records of Osmund Sheldahl." Undated newspaper article framed and hung in the Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church.
7. Newspaper article with unknown title and date framed and hung in the Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church.
8. "Obituary of O. Sheldahl Reveals Much History." Undated newspaper article framed and hung in the Sheldahl Norwegian Lutheran Church.

APPENDIX

The church was originally organized under the name of the First Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Sheldahl, Story County, Iowa. Its charter members were:

Halvor O. Sheldahl	Eric Tesdahl
Sire Sheldahl	Olie Houge
Halvor H. Tesdahl	Volborg Houge
Guro Tesdahl	John O. Houge
Olie H. Tesdahl	Sjur O. Houge
Tom Rasmussen	Anfin O. Houge
Anjer Rasmussen	Torjon Houge
Halvor Thomson	Anna Houge
Aselina Thomson	Iver Fisher
Nels C. Veste	Oliva Fisher (5)
Kare S. Veste	
Steen N. Veste	

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